

Message Text

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AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

AMEMBASSY RANGOON

AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI

AMCONSUL UDORN

CINCPAC HAWAII

DIA WASHDC

AMCONSUL SONGKHLA

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 BANGKOK 14822

E.O. 11652: XGDS

TAGS : PGOV, PINR, TH

SUBJECT : EVALUATION OF NEW SENIOR MILITARY
LEADERSHIP APPOINTMENTS

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

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SUMMARY: THE RTG ANNOUNCED SEPTEMBER 11 A LONG SERIES OF
SENIOR MILITARY PERSONNEL SHIFTS EFFECTIVE OCTOBER 1.
THE MOST SIGNIFICANT OF THESE ARE GEN. KRIT SIVARA'S ELEVATION
FROM DEPUTY COMMANDER IN CHIEF TO CINC ROYAL THAI
ARMY (RTA) VICE FIELD MARSHAL PRAPHAT CHARUSATHIEN; AIR
CHIEF MARSHAL DAWEE CHULLASAPYA FROM CHIEF OF STAFF (C OF S)
SUPREME COMMAND TO ASSISTANT SUPREME COMMANDER;
AND GEN. SURAKIJ MAYALARP FROM ARMY C OF S TO C OF S, SUPREME
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COMMAND, VICE DAWEE. KRIT'S ASSIGNMENT AS CINC/RTA ALLEVIATES

THE POTENTIAL POLITICAL CRISIS GENERATED BY THANOM'S AND PRAPHAT'S EXTENSIONS LAST MAY, AND THE POSSIBILITY THAT KRIT WOULD BE BYPASSED (TO CREATE AN AVENUE OF ACCESSION FOR NARONG KITTI-KACHORN). IT ALSO OPENS UP SENIOR RTA PROMOTIONS. DAWEE'S LONG RUMORED "PROMOTION" TO ASSISTANT SUPREME COMMANDER IS A KICK UPSTAIRS THAT WILL PROBABLY TAKE HIM OUT OF THE MAINSTREAM OF HIS PREVIOUS RESPONSIBILITIES, AND REFLECTS DAWEE'S DECREASED TRACTION WITHIN THE LEADERSHIP ELITE. SURAKI'S PROMOTION TO CHIEF OF STAFF, SUPREME COMMAND, PERPETUATES HIS PREVIOUS ROLE AS PRAPHAT'S CHIEF OF STAFF, BUT AT THE SUPREME COMMAND LEVEL. THESE CHANGES DO NOT SIGNAL ANY BASIC CHANGE IN THE POWER BALANCE. THEY MERELY PROMOTE THE MOST SENIOR DEPUTIES SHORTLY BEFORE THEIR RETIREMENTS. WE DO NOT ANTICIPATE THAT THESE AND OTHER PERSONNEL SHIFTS WILL ALTER SIGNIFICANTLY THE EMBASSY'S DAY-TO-DAY WORKING RELATIONS WITH SUPREME COMMAND HEADQUARTERS (FORWARD) END SUMMARY.

1. THE MOST SIGNIFICANT OF THE MILITARY APPOINTMENTS ANNOUNCED LAST WEEK ARE: GEN. KRIT SIVARA AS COMMANDER IN CHIEF OF TPK ARMY; GEN. SURAKIT MAYALARP FROM ARMY CHIEF OF STAFF TO CHIEF OF STAFF, SUPREME COMMAND; AND ACM DAWEE CHULLASAPYA FROM CHIEF OF STAFF, SUPREME COMMAND TO ASSISTANT SUPREME COMMANDER. OTHER APPOINTMENTS INCLUDE GEN. TAWIT SENIWONGSE NA AYUTTHAYA FROM ASSISTANT CINC TO DEPUTY CINC OF THE ARMY; LTG CHOTE HIRANYATHITI FROM DIRECTOR OF ARMY FIELD FORCES TO ONE OF TWO ASSISTANT CINC'S OF THE ARMY; AND LTG SAMRAN PHAETHAYAKUL FROM COMMANDER THIRD ARMY TO BE THE OTHER ASSISTANT CINC OF THE ARMY. LT. GENERAL BOONCHAI BAMRUNGPONG GOES FROM DEPUTY C OF S TO C OF S OF THE ARMY.

KRIT SIVARA

2. KRIT'S APPOINTMENT AS CINC/RTA IS SIGNIFICANT FOR AVOIDING WHAT COULD HAVE BECOME A MAJOR POLITICAL CRISIS. IT INVOLVES TURNING OVER THE POWER TO THE MOST SENIOR LIEUTENANT AND CAN BE EXPECTED TO DEFUSE VIRTUALLY ALL OF THE INCIPIENT POLITICAL CRISIS THAT WAS BREWING OVER THE POSSIBILITY OF REPEATED EXTENSIONS FOR THANOM AND PRAPHAT THAT WOULD HAVE SHUT KRIT OUT. THE APPOINTMENT

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OPENS UP FOR KRIT THE EVENTUAL POSSIBILITY OF BECOMING PRIME MINISTER, AND WILL CERTAINLY AFFORD HIM THE OPPORTUNITY NEXT YEAR, WHEN ANOTHER ROUND OF RETIREMENTS COMES UP, TO PLACE HIS FOLLOWERS IN KEY RTA POSITIONS.

DAWEE CHULLASAPYA

3. DAWEE'S LONG RUMORED APPOINTMENT AS ASSISTANT SUPREME COMMANDER IS A KICK UPSTAIRS THAT PUTS DAWEE EFFECTIVELY

ON THE SHELF AND OUT OF THE MAINSTREAM OF THE RULING
INNER CIRCLE'S WORK. IT REMAINS TO BE SEEN, HOWEVER, HOW
MANY OF DAWEE'S SECONDARY JOBS, SUCH AS HIS BORDER
COMMITTEE JOBS, AND HIS RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE MOBILE
DEVELOPMENT UNITS, THE IBMND, AND THE CIF, HE WILL RETAIN.

OTHERS

4. SURAKIJS' BECOMING SUPREME COMMAND CHIEF OF STAFF
APPEARS TO RELATE TO THE POSSIBILITY OF PRAPHAT'S
ULTIMATELY REPLACING THANOM AS THE SUPREME COMMANDER.
THIS WOULD PERPETUATE AT A HIGHER LEVEL PRAPHAT'S AND SURAKIJ'S
PRESENT RELATIONSHIP AS COMMANDER AND CHIEF OF STAFF OF THE ARMY.
AS WITH DAWEE, WE DO NOT YET KNOW WHETHER SURAKIJ WILL
TAKE WITH HIM SOME OF HIS SECONDARY JOBS, EXPECIALLY HIS
RESPONSIBILITY AS C OF S OF THE COMMUNIST SUPPRESSION
OPERATIONS COMMAND.

5. THE APPOINTMENT OF LT. GEN. BOONCHAI BAMRUNGPONG AS
ARMY CHIEF OF STAFF VICE SURAKIJ IS CERTAIN TO BE
APPLAUDED BY THE FRONT LINE TROOPS WITH WHOM HE IS VERY
POPULAR. HE IS NOT A POLITICAL MAN BUT A SOLDIER'S
SOLDIER WHO WILL PROBABLY CONFINE HIMSELF TO RUNNING THE ARMY.

6. LTG KRIANGSAK CHOMANAN'S PROMOTION IS FROM DEPUTY CHIEF OF
STAFF OF SUPREME COMMAND HEADQUARTERS (FORWARD) TO DEPUTY
CHIEF OF STAFF OF THE SUPREME COMMAND.

7. THERE ARE UNSUBSTANTIATED RUMORS IN HIGH PLACES THAT THANOM
WILL STEP DOWN AS BOTH SUPREME COMMANDER AND PRIME MINISTER,
PERHAPS AS EARLY AS THE END OF THIS YEAR, AND TURN THESE
JOBS OVER TO PRAPHAT. SHOULD HE DO THIS, NO FURTHER
CHANGES WILL BE NECESSARY IN THE RECENTLY ANNOUNCED LINE
UP, ALTHOUGH KRIT WOULD STAND TO INHERIT FROM PRAPHAT SUCH
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POSITIONS AS DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER AND DEPUTY CINC OF
THE SUPREME COMMAND, NOT TO MENTION SOME OF PRAPHAT'S
UNMANAGEABLY NUMEROUS COMMITTEE CHAIRMANSHIPS.

EFFECTS ON DAY-TO-DAY US/RTG RELATIONS

8. WE DO NOT ANTICIPATE ANY REAL CHANGES IN OUR
RELATIONS WITH THE RTG AS A RESULT OF SURAKIJ'S REPLACING
DAWEE AT SUPREME COMMAND. SURAKIJ
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ACTION EA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 PM-07 NSC-10 SPC-03 SS-15 RSC-01

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OTHER GENERAL OFFICERS WILL BE AVAILABLE FOR HIM TO FILL WITH MEN OF HIS CHOICE. MOST OF THESE ARE NOT YET KNOWN BECAUSE THE PROMOTION LIST FROM MAJOR GENERAL TO LIEUTENANT GENERAL HAS NOT BEEN ANNOUNCED. AT THAT TIME THE FULL RANGE OF PROMOTIONS AND SHIFTS OF COMMANDS WILL GIVE US A CLEARER PICTURE HOW FULLY THE PROMOTION LOG JAM HAS BEEN BROKEN, AND TO WHOSE BENEFIT.

12. DAWEE'S SLIPPAGE FROM GRACE HAS BEEN THE SUBJECT OF PERSISTENT RUMORS FOR WELL OVER SIX MONTHS. WE ATTRIBUTE IT AT LEAST IN PART TO DISSATISFACTION WITH HIS EFFORTS TO KEEP THE CHINESE IRREGULAR FORCES (CIF) OUT OF THE NARCOTICS BUSINESS AFTER THE 26 TON OPIUM DEAL IN MARCH 1972. IN ADDITION, DAWEE'S KEY STOCK IN TRADE HAS BEEN HIS RELATIONS WITH THE U.S., AND HIS ABILITY TO OBTAIN GENEROUS FOREIGN AID FROM US. WHEN, THROUGH NO FAULT OF DAWEE'S MILITARY AID DECLINED, HE BEGAN TO LOSE TRACTION ACCORDINGLY IN THE LEADERSHIP CIRCLE. ANOTHER THEORY HAS BEEN THAT DAWEE IS TOO "LIBERAL" AND THINKS MORE IN TERMS OF WHAT IS GOOD FOR THE PEOPLE THAN OF WHAT IS GOOD FOR THE GOVERNMENT. IN PARTICULAR, HE IS KNOWN TO HAVE WANTED TO BE MORE CONCILIATORY TO THE STUDENTS THAN THE OTHER

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LEADERS AND HAS SAID PRIVATELY THAT HE FINDS THE PRESENT RTG STUDENT POLICY HARD TO EXPLAIN TO HIS OWN STUDENT AGE CHILDREN.

13. BEYOND ALL OF THESE REASONS, DAWEE HAS ALWAYS BEEN THE EXPENDABLE MEMBER OF THE CLIQUE, THE MAN WITH INFLUENCE BUT NO POWER BASE. THUS, HIS INTERESTS HAVE BEEN SACRIFICED TO PROMOTE OTHERS, IN PARTICULAR SURAKIJ, WHOSE NEEDS HAD TO BE MET BECAUSE OF THEIR

REAL POLITICAL CLOUT.

14. DAWEE HAS FOR MANY YEARS BEEN ACTIVE ON THAILAND'S BILATERAL BORDER COMMITTEES WITH MALAYSIA AND BURMA. HIS MEMBERSHIP HAS, HOWEVER, BEEN EX-OFFICIO AS CHIEF OF STAFF, SUPREME COMMAND HEADQUARTERS (FORWARD), RATHER THAN IN HIS OWN NAME LIKE SOME OF THE OTHER MEMBERS. THIS DISTINCTION MAY MEAN THAT DAWEE WILL LOSE HIS BORDER COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIPS TO SURAKIJ, BUT THAT COULD BE CHANGED. IT IS NOT YET CLEAR TO US WHETHER DAWEE IS STILL GOING TO HAVE PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE CIF, OR WHETHER THAT IS GOING TO BE PASSED TO SURAKIJ OR TO SOMEONE ELSE. IN ANY CASE, HE STILL HAS HIS CABINET PORTFOLIO AND EVINCES GREAT INTEREST IN HIS JOB AS MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE AND COOPERATIVES.

15. WE ARE NOT ENTIRELY CLEAR ON THE EXACT PROCESS WHEREBY THESE ASSIGNMENTS WERE DETERMINED. THANOM AND PRAPHAT DID AGREE ON THEM BEFORE SENDING THE LIST TO THE KING, BUT SOME SOURCES INDICATE THAT PRAPHAT'S AGREEMENT WAS NOT WHOLE HEARTED BECAUSE HE DID NOT BECOME SUPREME COMMANDER HIMSELF IN EXCHANGE FOR GIVING UP HIS POWER BASE AS CINC/RTA. WE IMAGINE THAT THEY ALSO DISCUSSED WITH KRIT AT LEAST THE ARMY POSITIONS. KRIT TOLD AN EMBASSY OFFICER SEPTEMBER 17 THAT HIS PROMOTION HAD COME AS NO SURPRISE, BUT HAD BEEN THE RESULT OF A PLAN THAT THANOM AND PRAPHAT HAD WORKED OUT WITH HIM OVER THE LAST FEW MONTHS.

16. THE EXACT TERMS, IF ANY, THAT KRIT MAY HAVE AGREED TO AS PART OF THE DEAL FOR HIS GETTING THE COMMAND OF THE ARMY ARE NOT YET KNOWN TO US.

17. WE HAVE HEARD FROM SEVERAL SOURCES THAT NARONG KITTIKACHORN IS QUITE UPSET BY KRIT'S ACCESSION TO THE TOP OF THE ARMY. REPORTEDLY, NARONG ASKED HIS FATHER, THANOM, TO SEE THE LIST BEFORE HIS MAJESTY SIGNED AND PROMULGATED IT; THANOM PUT HIM OFF. WE AGREE WITH OBSERVERS WHO BELIEVE THAT KRIT IS TOO SMART AND TOO SUBTLE TO

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EXILE NARONG PROMPTLY, BUT IT GOES WITHOUT SAYING THAT KRIT'S PROMOTION PUTS A SEVERE AND POSSIBLY FATAL KINK IN NARONG'S PLANS FOR HIS FUTURE ADVANCEMENT. KRIT ALSO REMARKED SEPTEMBER 17 THAT NARONG WAS "AMBITIOUS IN A GOOD WAY," BUT WANTED TO CLIMB TOO HIGH TOO QUICKLY. NO DOUBT KRIT WILL SAVE HIM FROM THIS FAILING.

CONCLUSIONS

18. THE LIST OF SIGNIFICANT APPOINTMENTS IS SO LACKING IN SURPRISES THAT THE WONDER IS THAT IT TOOK SO LONG FOR THANOM AND PRAPHAT TO BRING THEMSELVES TO DO IT. FOR THE MOST PART, THE TOP MILITARY JOBS ARE TOMBSTONE PROMOTIONS GOING TO MEN WHO WILL HOLD THEM TOO BRIEFLY TO DO MUCH, AND WHO ARE TIRED, AND IN SOME CASES IN ILL HEALTH BESIDES. THE NOTEWORTHY ASPECTS ARE REWARDING KRIT AND PAVING HIS WAY AS A POSSIBLE SUCCESSOR TO THANOM, ECLIPSING NARONG, AND

SIGNALLING THE BEGINNING OF DAWEE'S GRACEFUL DEMISE. THERE ARE NO
DRAMATIC CHANGES IN THE THANOM/PRAPHAT POWER BALANCE, BUT MORE AN
ORDERLY TURN-OVER TO (SLIGHTLY) YOUNGER MEN.
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